

Weeds

What is a weed?

*A plant whose virtues have
not yet been discovered.*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Blackberries



Although blackberries are native to this region, the species of blackberry that is most invasive is the Himalayan blackberry, an imported species that has naturalized here. It is, however, a source of food and cover for many species of wildlife, not to mention the source of countless jars of blackberry jam. It arrives in your landscape through the help of birds, which introduce seeds in their droppings, or by the invasive roots that creep under fences and out of naturalized areas into your yard.

Nothing other than hard labor and natural decomposition will make the canes go away. Furthermore, no herbicide will completely control the roots, so if you use physical methods or chemical methods to control blackberries, continual, persistent removal of the new growth will be necessary for at least a year following your initial efforts.

Prevention

Encourage the growth of desirable plants, especially vigorous shrubs that will cover the ground, and use mulches wherever possible.

Physical control

Remove canes by hand and pull as many roots as possible. Wear leather gloves, a long-sleeved shirt and long pants to protect yourself from the thorns. Winter is an especially good time since the heavy clothing will

be more comfortable and the leaves will be off the plants, making them a little easier to work through. During the growing season, continue to remove the new canes as they appear. If there are no desirable plants within a foot or two of the cut blackberry canes, pour boiling water on the cut stumps. Also, remember that if a site has been neglected for a very long time, this will be heavy, uncomfortable work. Do yourself a favor and be realistic about how much area you can clear in a day.

Least-toxic chemical control

If chemical control is necessary, paint a systemic herbicide on the leaves while the plant is actively growing. The herbicide will move through the plant to kill the roots.

Bittercress



This member of the mustard family has a circle of leaves at its base and produces 6" to 8" stems with white flowers. The flowers mature into inch-long seeds that pop off when disturbed. This plant is prolific only in the spring; by summer, it should be no problem.

Prevention

In flower or ornamental plant beds, use a deep organic mulch to reduce their numbers.

Physical control

In late February, before the flowers go to seed, manually pull them or hoe them. If you manually remove them early in the season as soon as they start to grow, the seeds won't spread and increase the problem.

Clover



Clover comes in many varieties, all three-leafed and low-lying. Clover spreads by sending out shoots.

Prevention

Clover in a lawn is usually the result of excess phosphorus or low nitrogen. Lawns need more nitrogen than either phosphorus or potassium. Since clover makes its own nitrogen, it is stimulated to grow in high phosphorus conditions. Fertilize with a nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium mix of 15-5-10 or 23-8-12, or use a nitrogen-rich organic fertilizer such as alfalfa meal or cottonseed meal. Do not over fertilize; excess chemicals can run off and contaminate water.

Dandelion



Dandelions have a long thick tap root that stores food reserves. Dandelion seeds are dispersed by wind.

Prevention

Minimize them by not allowing the flower to go to seed. Mow lawns often to keep the flowers from maturing. In flower or ornamental plant beds, use a deep organic mulch to reduce their numbers.

Physical control

Hand dig them out, removing as much of the root as possible. Spot treating with boiling water is an effective control, especially when you

pull the weed first and treat the root. In lawns, removing dandelions leaves small bare areas where new weed seed can germinate. Spread a little grass seed in those spots to prevent weeds from establishing.

Horsetail rush



Horsetail rush is an ancient plant that can be attractive in natural settings, but easily becomes a pest in the garden. It spreads by spores or by its root system, which can be as deep as 12'. Its presence indicates that the soil is wet clay, tending to be acidic. Try drying out the area if possible. Or consider planting other water-loving plants, such as rushes and sedges, to add a more natural element to your landscape.

Physical control

Hand pull or hoe out the above ground growth as it appears. Persistence is necessary, but over time, this will deplete its energy reserves and achieve control. When the weed dies down in winter, cover the area with weed barrier cloth and leave in place for two years to prevent weeds from photosynthesizing. Even then, roots may still be able to push up new growth.

Morning glory



Morning glory is a weedy vine that will twine all over the garden, covering plants to the point of smothering them. It is usually spread by seed or invasive roots. Its thick fleshy roots can travel long distances just under the soil surface.

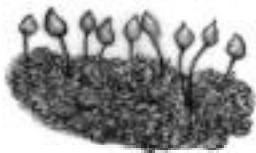
Physical control

Hand weeding can remove large quantities of roots, but any broken pieces are capable of sprouting new growth. Never dispose of morning glory in your compost pile. Repeated, persistent digging or rototilling as the new growth sprouts can deplete the food reserves and allow other plants to compete successfully. Keeping all green parts removed from mid-summer to late fall will starve the roots and help control morning glory and other perennial weeds. Be persistent; it can take a long time to eliminate morning glory from your yard.

Least-toxic chemical control

If chemical control is required, do not spray. Paint the leaves with the least-toxic systemic herbicide available when the plant is actively feeding its roots. A systemic will move from the leaves through the plant's vascular system to kill the roots. Do not put plant parts that have been treated with herbicides into your compost pile.

Moss



Moss is a natural part of the Pacific Northwest's native groundcover. If your lawn has moss, consider leaving it there or allowing it to spread in planting beds to form an attractive groundcover. It prefers shade, moisture, and poor acid soils.

Prevention

Correct the conditions that encourage moss to grow. Water infrequently but deeply, making sure that the water is penetrating and not running off. Proper aeration and thatching of lawns will help air flow. Do not apply water faster than the soil can absorb it. Soil should be limed and fertilized to encourage the growth of desired plants or turf. If trees shade an area, consider pruning them to introduce more sunlight.

Physical control

Rake moss out of lawns.

Least-toxic chemical control

Apply an herbicidal soap or an iron-based product that turns the moss black as it dies. Keep these products off concrete, as they will stain.

Poison oak



In the open or in filtered sun, poison oak grows as a dense leafy shrub. Where shaded, it becomes a climbing vine. Its leaves are divided into three leaflets. Poison ivy, which grows in eastern Washington, is very similar, but it is more sprawling in growth habit and rarely climbs. The foliage of both turns bright orange or scarlet in the fall.

Prevention

Poison oak will eventually die out if you keep it clipped to within an inch or two of the ground with a power mower or hand clippers. Grasses tend to crowd it out so it can't get enough height to put out leaves.

Physical control

Woody perennials, such as poison oak and wild blackberries, have high reproductive capacities, and established plants are difficult to eradicate by digging. But it is not impossible. Mulching is the easiest way to rid yourself of stubborn perennial weeds, but it may take a year or two. Grub out rootstocks, treat with boiling water, mulch heavily. Mulch options include old carpeting, old swimming pool liner, 10 to 20 sheets of weighted newspapers or sheet metal, such as old tin roofing. To eradicate young plants, put on a long-sleeved jacket and leather gloves and pull them out by hand as fast as they appear to destroy the roots.

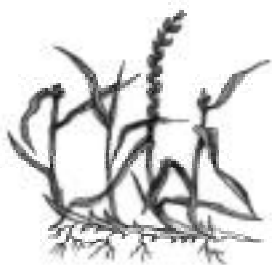
Biological control

If the plant is young and not woody, goats, if managed properly, can be helpful in eliminating woodier weeds such as poison oak and ivy, wild blackberry, bamboo and scotch broom.

Least-toxic chemical control

If plants persist, paint the leaves with the least-toxic systemic herbicide available rather than spraying.

Quackgrass



Quackgrass forms dense spreading mats with white, fleshy roots.

Physical control

Keep pulling it out. Pieces of root left in the soil can sprout new growth. Sift the soil carefully to make sure you remove all root pieces. Try covering it with weed barrier cloth. If mowed regularly, quackgrass does not seriously detract from the appearance of a lawn. Mowing will gradually cause quackgrass to decline.

Least-toxic chemical control

Try spot treating with boiling water. If the grass still persists, do not spray. Paint the leaves when they are about 8" high with the least-toxic systemic herbicide available when the plant is actively feeding its roots. A systemic will move from the leaves through the plant's vascular system and kill the roots. Do not put plant parts that have been treated with herbicides into your compost pile.

Thistles



Thistles have leaves with sharp prickles and spread by seed or underground shoots.

Prevention

In flower or ornamental plant beds, use a deep organic mulch to reduce their numbers.

Physical control

Pull them out and cover troublesome areas with weed barrier cloth. Spot treat with boiling water.